

South Sudan:
**Conflict Mapping, Ontological
Security and Institutionalised
Conflict**
- Executive Summary -

Conflict
Analysis

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Rachel Morrow

2014 Summer Field Research Intern
The University of Oxford

Supervised, reviewed, and edited by
Generations For Peace Institute:
Nabila Hussein, Sairah Yusuf, Jadranka Stikovic Clark

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Research Conducted

In June 2014, Rachel Morrow, Generations For Peace-sponsored Summer Field Research Intern from the University of Oxford, travelled to South Sudan to carry out a mapping exercise in Juba, country's capital, prior to the commencement of local Generations For Peace programmes. Generations For Peace (GFP), a peace-building NGO based in Amman, Jordan, trains volunteers from conflict or post-conflict regions to implement grassroots conflict transformation programmes utilising the vehicles of sport, art, advocacy, dialogue and empowerment. As GFP has trained volunteers from 50 countries, the organisation undoubtedly recognises that conflict situations vary drastically across regions, nations and cities; thus, commissioning a research intern to map the conflict situation in Juba prior to commencing programmes was a necessary action. The research introduced here (completed in December 2014), explores the facts, perceptions, intricacies, causes and dynamics of the December 2013 crisis in Juba, South Sudan. Thereafter it offers recommendations and options for GFP so that an informed, context-specific and relevant peace-building programmes can be designed.

Research Framework

As stated, this paper essentially aims to map the conflict in South Sudan, and in particular the ethnic violence that broke out in Juba in December 2013. It does this on a number of levels. Firstly, it tells the story of what happened and who was involved; it conveys the chronological unfolding of events that led up to and included the period from 15 to 18 December 2013. In addition to a chronological mapping of the incident, this paper also explores why the violence broke out. While this answer is incredibly complex and multi-faceted, this piece proposes that political and military realities are two key contributors. On the one hand, it engages with the political realities: the political disjuncture that had been brewing in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) for not just months but years leading up to the December massacre. Closely linked to, and indeed inseparable from the political reality is the military reality. The violence of the December events and the current conflict was, and is largely carried out by the different military factions in South Sudan. Understanding how the military and political elements interact in South Sudan is part of understanding this conflict.

Undoubtedly however, ordinary citizens carried out violence as well. Explaining the political and military reality is not sufficient to explain why citizens could be motivated to attack and steal from their neighbours. Citizens are certainly not cut off from aggressive military and political manoeuvres: indeed they are highly connected

to, mobilised by and partisan in these processes. However such extreme acts of violence require a more robust explanation than mere political mobilisation. Recognising this, the research presented goes beyond conflict mapping and explores the hypotheses of ontological security and institutionalisation of conflict in Juba.

The ontological security section of this report argues that the sustained and perpetual ethnic conflict between the Nuer and the Dinka in South Sudan has entrenched relations of distrust, uncertainty and in some cases hatred. Ontological security is a firm sense of Self, maintained by entrenched relations with significant Others. The Nuer and Dinka have been cattle raiding enemies for decades, during which time enemy relations have become largely entrenched. Ethnic fighting between the Nuer and Dinka continued even during the civil war against Khartoum. Even the common enemy of Khartoum was not enough to consistently unite these enemies. Ontological security explains the resilience of these enemy relations: each ethnicity is unable to let go of their negative perceptions of the Other, because those perceptions are integral to sustaining a consistent sense of Self. This explanation sounds logical, and the findings support it to a certain extent. The desire for ontological security becomes heightened when physical insecurity decreases: and therefore the political dissonance triggered a fear over physical security that heightened the desire for ontological security. And with it, heightened feelings of distrust and hatred between the Nuer and Dinka.

The institutionalisation of violence section explains why these feelings of distrust and hatred manifested in the form of violence. The various formal and informal institutions in South Sudan that have developed over time to generate social order have included violence as an available and indeed useful mechanism. With violence as an option, combined with the military fighting in the barracks, combined with a heightened desire for ontological security, the complexity of the December events can be explained.



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Methodologies

In order to carry out this research, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were carried out with members of the Dinka and Nuer communities in Juba, the two largest ethnic groups in South Sudan. A total of 15 interviews and 48 questionnaires were completed by members of these two communities, between whom the violence broke out in December 2013, and from this data several informed assertions are presented in this report.

As the documentation of the crisis in December 2013 is fairly limited, further investigation was required to acquire a more detailed analysis of the situation. In addition, much of what is available tends to be the perspectives of the elite in South Sudan: either top political players or employees of intergovernmental organisations. Thus, interviews with locals provided further insight into the situation as perceived by those who were on the ground during the conflict. In terms of analysis, data collected through interviews was treated as fact, in the same way as relevant research papers and newspaper articles. The notion was, that if something that was pervasive across interviews and questionnaires from both ethnicities contradicted an article, the trustworthiness of the article was called into question. Likewise, when a “fact” was represented in an interview that had been contradicted by a number of newspaper articles and in some cases other interviews, that “fact” was considered more as a perception.

As for the questionnaires, the aim was to get as many different observations as possible, and to ensure that as many opinions and ideas from the population were covered as possible. The length and quantifiable nature of the answers meant that datasets could be created, and more broadly applicable conclusions drawn. The information gathered through questionnaires was then deconstructed into a single dataset. This data was then worked with: averages and totals calculated and values represented in graphical and tabulated form. This gave a better idea regarding both the scope and nature of opinions and ideas held regarding the conflict. In other words, this conveyed the general ideas and perceptions that each group holds.



Recommendations

In addressing the concepts of conflict mapping, ontological security and institutionalised violence, this research had the broader aim of identifying steps forward for GFP and its local volunteers in Juba. After providing a clear understanding of the conflict in South Sudan, the paper moves to make key recommendations for Generations For Peace. In sum, these are:

- Advocacy For Peace: GFP should advocate for the institutions that support violence as an option for dealing with crises, to become increasingly peaceful. This tool is vital for including elders into GFP's work. Because of the high standing that elders have in South Sudan, it is vital that they are targeted by GFP's work.
- Sport For Peace: South Sudan is in urgent need of truth and reconciliation. As mentioned, the Nuer and the Dinka have long fought one another, and stories of the Other's violence entrenches relations of enmity. Sport can be a vital tool for reconciling communities that have long help misperceptions of the Other. Incorporated into the sport and sport-based games should be peace-building education, which would support changes in the institutionalisation of violence.
- Art For Peace: Again, the value here is that it provides truth and reconciliation to communities in desperate need of it. Through this process, the types of relations that provide ontological security could be altered.
- Dialogue For Peace: When interviewing both the Dinka and the Nuer, there was a clear tendency for both sides to view their ethnic groups as the victims of the Other ethnicity. The goal is that through a truth-telling experience, both sides will become aware of the Other's suffering. With this awareness may come an understanding that enhances reconciliation.

The aspiration in placing emphasis on these four vehicles for peace building (four of the five models regularly used by GFP elsewhere), is that Generations For Peace can begin to dismantle the social elements that have enhanced and created violence in South Sudan.



About the Summer Field Research Intern

Rachel Morrow

Between 2009 and 2012, Durban-born Rachel Morrow attended the University of KwaZulu-Natal where she completed a BSS in Political Science and Economics and a B Comm in Economics. From South Africa, Rachel moved to the UK in 2013/2014, where she studied for a MSc in Global Governance and Diplomacy at the University of Oxford. Throughout her studies, Rachel has developed interests and gained knowledge of peace building, conflict transformation and development. She was an intern at the Peacebuilding Unit of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) before joining Generations For Peace as Summer Field Research Intern and conducting the research project in South Sudan. Rachel has been awarded several scholarships and awards, such as the Skoll Social Innovation Case Competition, Skye Foundation Scholarship, and Mandela-Rhodes Scholarship.

About the Summer Field Research

Generations For Peace awards two research grants annually to selected postgraduate students pursuing Masters or Doctorate studies at the University of Oxford. The awardees conduct a field research which takes place during the University's summer vacations. The multi-disciplinary field research is focused on an activity or programme implemented in one or more countries in which Generations For Peace volunteers operate. In terms of outputs, each awardee is expected to provide a full research report focused on the local activity/programme, including a detailed write-up of the research conducted and any practical recommendations for the activity/programme organisers; and a supplementary report with further meta analysis and recommendations for Generations For Peace regarding activity/programme adjustment and opportunities for further research. A key objective of Generations For Peace in supporting research grants is to support knowledge transfer and capacity development therefore, it is also expected that the awardees will use their best endeavours to demonstrate (within the limits of practical context of their particular research situation) some knowledge transfer to and capacity development of the local actors.



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